

Lofgren Explores Human Rights Violations and Censorship in Vietnam

Briefing Focuses on Vietnam's Assault on the Media and Access to Information

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Washington, DC – Today, U.S. Representatives Zoe Lofgren (D-San Jose) and Loretta Sanchez (D-Garden Grove), co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Vietnam, hosted a briefing today that addresses the Vietnamese government's oppressive censorship of various media outlets. Congresswoman Lofgren issued the following statement on current state of freedom of speech in Vietnam:

"The dismal state of freedom of the press and the lack of the free flow of information in Vietnam needs to be heard and I am pleased that you are all here to help us raise awareness in Congress and in the public.

"It is discouraging to me that Congresswoman Sanchez and I have to continuously hold these briefings on a bi-annual basis. I certainly look forward, in great anticipation, to the day when we no longer need these briefings.

"Unfortunately, Vietnamese citizens are being persecuted for communicating with the outside world at a time when the Vietnamese government is expressing interest in becoming more integrated with the global community.

"The Vietnamese Constitution says "[t]he citizen shall enjoy freedom of opinion and speech, freedom of the press, the right to be informed, and the right to assemble, form associations and hold demonstrations in accordance with the provisions of the law." However, the Vietnamese government has systematically suppressed the free flow of information and freedom of the press with decrees and directives that subvert the free flow of information under the guise of national security. There are persistent reports of imprisoned journalists and jammed radio and internet sites all over Vietnam.

"Just a few weeks ago, relatives of a detained priest, Father Ly, were sentenced to three to five years for so-called "abuse of democratic freedoms" when it appears all they were doing was exercising those very democratic freedoms they supposedly abused.

"Reporters without Borders says Tran Khue, a 67-year-old literature teacher and founder of an anti-corruption group, was arrested on December 29th, 2002 for posting government criticism on the internet. He has been held without trial and government authorities will not confirm or deny rumors that he may have died in detention.

"On February 21st, 2002, Reporters Without Borders says Le Chi Quang was arrested at a cybercafe in Hanoi by an undercover police officer for allegedly posting "dangerous information" on the internet.

"The International Institute for Vietnam reports that Professor Nguyen Dinh Huy, a journalist and writer, was arrested in 1993 and sentenced to 15 years in prison for urging the Vietnamese government to respect freedom of the press, expression, creativity, publication and dissemination of information. He remains in prison today.

"In another report from the International Institute for Vietnam, Nguyen Khac Toan has been serving a 12-year sentence since December of 2002 for posting internet reports on peasant protests against government corruption staged in front of government buildings.

"Worse yet is report after report of political dissidents detained without trial: Nguyen Vu Binh for allegedly advocating democracy in essays posted on the internet; Nguyen Dan Que, a physician and editor of an underground newsletter being held for more than 18 years in various hard labor camps. The list goes on and on.

"Reporters Without Borders says that "Vietnam remains one of the world's most repressive countries where the Internet is

concerned.” They say, “[t]he [Vietnamese] government blocks access to websites it considers politically and morally ‘dangerous,’ including foreign news sites and those of human rights organizations set up by Vietnamese abroad.” Moreover, Reporters Without Borders says the government monitors the sites people visit and regularly hacks into websites they consider undesirable. One religious movement says the Vietnamese government sends computer viruses by e-mail to the movement’s followers.

“This is unacceptable.

“The US Commission on International Religious Freedom, Reporters Without Borders, and the International Institute for Vietnam are not alone. Members of Congress have repeatedly sent letters to the Vietnamese government asking them to release prisoners of conscience and to refrain from various forms of political, religious, and cultural oppression. Nobel Peace Prize Laureates have written the Prime Minister of Vietnam on behalf of Dr. Nguyen Dan Que, a Vietnamese doctor who has been held in incommunicado detention since March 17, 2003. The US State Department has steadily called for the release of prisoners. Unfortunately, the vast majority of these requests seem to fall on deaf ears.

“Until Vietnam stops oppressing its people, the Commission on International Religious Freedom, Reporters Without Borders, the International Institute for Vietnam, Members of Congress, and other organizations and individuals will continue to hold press conferences to raise awareness. We will form and participate in Congressional Caucuses that focus on human rights abuses in Vietnam. We will advocate for legislation such as the Vietnam Human Rights Act and the Freedom of Information in Vietnam Act. We will hold Congressional briefings, like this one, to inform Congress and the public of Vietnam’s government restrictions on information and the media.

“The world is watching and we will not cease until we see improvements in Vietnam.”